

Message Text

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16

ACTION ARA-10

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R 191446Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 357

INFO AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

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USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 0868

USCINCSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, ES

SUBJECT: UNO COALITION RECEIVES BODY BLOW

REF: SAN SALVADOR 323

1. THE CENTRAL ELECTION COUNCIL (CCE), A THREE PERSON BOARD WITH THE CONSTITUTIONAL MANDATE TO SUPERVISE ALL ASPECTS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS DUE TO BE HELD ON MARCH 14, DEALT AN OVERWHELMINGLY DAMAGING BLOW TO THE OPPOSITION UNO COALITION ON FEBRUARY 17, WHEN IT THREW OUT THAT GROUP'S SLATE OF CANDIDATES FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF SAN SALVADOR.

2. THIS WAS THE SECOND, AND APPARENTLY FINAL, FINDING BY THE CCE THAT THE UNO SLATE WAS INELIGIBLE FOR INSCRIPTION ON THE BALLOT. ON FEBRUARY 12, 48 HOURS BEFORE THE DEADLINE FOR FINAL CANDIDATE CERTIFICATION, THE CCE HAD ACTED FAVORABLY ON A PETITION BY THE GOVERNMENT PCN PARTY AND DISQUALIFIED THE ORIGINAL UNO SAN SALVADOR SLATE. THE CHARGES THE CCE SUSTAINED WERE THAT TWO OF THE UNO CANDIDATES (OUT OF A DEPARTMENTAL TOTAL OF 22, 11 PRIMARY AND 11 SUPLENTE CANDIDATES) WERE INELIGIBLE.

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THE FIRST OF THESE, (PDC LEADER JULIO ADOLFO REY PRENDES)

WAS SAID TO BE IN ARREARS ON HIS MUNICIPAL TAXES, AND THE SECOND (ALTERNATIVE CANDIDATE LUIS ANTONIO LOPEZ GARCIA) WAS CHARGED WITH SIGNING A GOVERNMENT CONTRACT WITH A MUNICIPALITY

INVOLVING CONSTRUCTION OF AN \$18,000 SPORTS FIELD, BOTH GROUNDS FOR INELIGIBILITY FOR PUBLIC OFFICE UNDER THE CONSTITUTION. UNO RESPONDED TO THE FIRST DISQUALIFICATION BY IMMEDIATELY SUBMITTING EVIDENCE THE REY PRENDES WAS NOT DELINQUENT ON HIS TAXES AND A NEW LIST, SUBSTITUTING ANOTHER'S NAME FOR LOPEZ GARCIA WAS SUBMITTED. IT WAS THIS SLATE THAT WAS DISALLOWED YESTERDAY, ON TECHNICAL GROUNDS THAT THIS WAS NOT A "NEW" SLATE.

3. THE FINAL DISQUALIFICATION OF THE UNO SAN SALVADOR SLATE IS A SERIOUS BLOW TO THE OPPOSITION. FIRST, IN THE PRESENT ASSEMBLY, THE DEPARTMENT OF SAN SALVADOR ACCOUNTS FOR 6 OF THE 15 UNO DEPUTIES. IN THE UPCOMING ELECTIONS, SAN SALVADOR'S RELATIVE STRENGTH WILL INCREASE TO 11 OF THE ASSEMBLY'S 54 SEATS, TWO MORE THAN IN THE OUTGOING BODY. NO ONLY IN NUMBERS, BUT ALSO IN QUALITY, THE SAN SALVADOR UNO DELEGATION IS THE CORE OF THE OPPOSITION'S POWER. THE DISQUALIFIED SLATE CONTAINS ALMOST ALL THE PRINCIPAL FIGURES OF THE OPPOSITION, INCLUDING JUAN RICARDO RAMIREZ RAUDA, PDC SECRETARY GENERAL; REY PRENDES (NUMBER TWO IN PDC), HUGO NAVARRETTE (MNR LEADER); AND MARIANELLA GARCIA VILLAS (EXTREMELY ACTIVE PDC WOMEN'S LEADER). AT ONE STROKE, THE CCE HAS EXCLUDED THE COALITION'S LEADERSHIP IN THE ASSEMBLY.

4. THIS IS NOT THE ONLY CCE DECISION THAT HAS GONE AGAINST THE UNO OPPOSITION. THE OPPOSITION'S SLATE OF CANDIDATES FOR LA UNION DEPARTMENT IS ALSO UNDER CHALLENGE. IF THAT CHALLENGE IS SUSTAINED, THE UNO WOULD ONLY FIELD CANDIDATES IN 11 OF THE 14 DEPARTMENTS (IT DIDN'T SUBMIT A LIST FOR MORAZAN). THERE ARE ALSO A NUMBER OF UNO MUNICIPAL SLATES THAT HAVE BEEN DECLARED INVALID. ALTHOUGH THE CCE CLAIMS THAT IT IS AN IMPARTIAL ARBITER, THE FACT THAT ITS 3 MEMBERS ARE APPOINTED BY THE SITTING PRESIDENT IS NOT LOST ON ANYONE.

5. THE FIRST REACTION TO THIS CCE (READ GOVERNMENT) ACTION IS ALREADY IN. THE PDC LEADERSHIP HAS CALLED FOR A NATIONAL PARTY CONVENTION THIS WEEKEND TO DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT TO WITH-DRAW FROM THE ELECTIONS IN PROTEST. IF THE PDC DOES SO, ITS UDN AND MNR COALITION PARTNERS WOULD CERTAINLY FOLLOW SUIT. THE PCN
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WOULD REMAIN IN THE FIELD UNOPPOSED. THERE APPEARS A BETTER THAN EVEN CHANCE THAT THIS WILL YHAPPEN, ACCORDING TO THE FIRST COMMENTS FROM SURPRISED AND ANGRY PDC LEADERS.

6. COMMENT - SOME WITHIN THE GOES CLAIM THIS DISQUALIFICATION OF THE OPPOSITION LEADERSHIP ON STRICTLY LEGAL GROUNDS IS A "BRILLIANT MOVE", AND ARE READY TO PAT THEMSELVES ON THE BACK FOR HAVING ACTED FULLY "WITHIN THE LAW". OTHERS WILL PROBABLY REALIZE, AND MOST IMPARTIAL OBSERVERS ARE LIKELY TO AGREE, THAT

THE ACTION WAS RATHER BLATANT, AND ARBITRARY
EFFORT BY THE REGIME TO FORESTALL A REAL OPPOSITION
CAMPAIGN.
CAMPBELL

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